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Iran and the KGB

British intelligence has obtained detailed information about the work of Soviet "moles" in Iran as a result of the defection of **Vladimir Andreyevich Kuzichkin**. **Ayatollah Khomeini's** Islamic nationalists have been able to purge the regime of communist infiltrators, many of them linked to the Tudeh communist party.

Kuzichkin had diplomatic cover as a vice-consul in Teheran. In fact, he was a senior KGB agent from department "T", which handles the operations of "illegals"—usually Soviet citizens who run espionage rings or obtain intelligence themselves while living in a country under an assumed identity. Although only 35, Kuzichkin has been described as a "flier"—a highly intelligent and well-informed spy who was being rapidly promoted within the KGB.

Before his defection, British intelligence had only a limited knowledge of Soviet operations in Iran and the extent of infiltration by Tudeh members. Now the British know the identities of some Soviet infiltrators, belonging to the ethnic minority groups that straddle the Soviet-Iranian border. Many of these agents are believed to have slipped across the border since the Shah was overthrown in 1979. Kuzichkin, a Farsi-speaker, had been assigned to the Soviet consulate in Teheran for five years and knew the KGB operation intimately.

A mystery remains about his whereabouts between disappearance from western Teheran in June, when his abandoned car was discovered, until last week, when his presence in Britain was announced. The Soviet embassy in Teheran anxiously asked the Iranians in June if they knew what had happened to him. The Iranians replied that they knew nothing. Kuzichkin apparently left Iran on his own, without British assistance.

Soon after Kuzichkin's disappearance, a Tudeh communications centre (camouflaged as an office where Khomeini's revolutionary guards carried out interrogations) was raided and a prominent Tudeh underground leader, **Hossein Zadeh**, was captured. This was followed by allegations by the Tudeh and the revolutionary guards that each was infiltrating the other's organisation. The defection of Kuzichkin seems to have dealt a serious blow to Soviet operations in Iran and alerted Khomeini's regime to the dangers it faces.